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ABSTRACT

Methods used for teaching children to read could be the whole language approach, or the phonics approach, or maybe a balance of both. This paper is a discussion of appropriate and effective teaching practices through interesting methods such as music, the use of culturally diverse materials, and the role of toys and television as they relate to reading. The paper begins with a review of the literature on teaching methods in reading and then discusses each practice in turn. It suggests that teachers, whether they opt for phonics or whole language or a combination of both, need to use a variety of classroom practices to engage students in beginning reading.

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Examination of Effective Teaching Methods with the Purpose of
Motivating Children to Learn How to Read

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Introduction

Elementary educators know that in order for children to learn how to read, they must attain phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and knowledge of alphabetic principles, orthographic awareness, and comprehension monitoring strategies (Wray, 1999). There are many ways to teach a child how to learn to read. One method can be the whole language approach, the phonics approach, or maybe a balance of both. However, how do we make this learning process enjoyable and interesting for students? What exciting and motivating instructional materials should educators use that include both phonics and whole language techniques?

Statement of the Problem

This paper is a discussion of appropriate and effective teaching practices of reading through interesting methods such as music, and culturally diverse materials. I also explore the role of toys and television as they relate to reading.

Literature Review

Music is a great instructional tool, especially for musical learners and what child does not like to sing, hum tunes, listen to music, play instruments and dance? Music can motivate children to learn to read. Songs can be effectively used for teaching phonemic awareness (Yopp & Yopp, 1996). Children can be more successful learning to read if the words of the text are familiar, such as the words to a favorite song (Towell, 1999)

Numerous methods are available for motivating students to read and for building literacy skills using music with literature. Some examples include, reading picture books made from songs and reading picture books written by musicians. Using music to set the mood for selected stories, combining poetry with music, and using instruments or sound effects contributes in motivating students to read (Towell, 1999). When students experience emotional responses while reading that are triggered by the music, they become engaged with the text. Combining rhyme, rhythm, rap, and repetition exposes children to the best of worlds, the world of music and the world of literature (Towel, 1999).

All children need books that represent their cultural heritage. In this way, all children have characters with whom they can identify (Opitz, 1999). Beginning readers also need books that facilitate successful independent reading experiences. Picture books and predictable books enable the novice reader to read with ease. Reading with ease enables the reader to enjoy the experience and feel successful and confident (Opitz, 1999).

Children can learn to read playing with teaching toys. Toys introduce the basics of reading to children in a playful way (Auerbach, 1995). When children understand the basic phonetic sounds and rules, they will be able to recognize many common words and sound out unfamiliar words with similar patterns, the first steps toward independent reading (Auerbach, 1995). The Leap Frogs illustrated talking Phonics Cards from the Leap Frog Phonics Learning System is one example of how toys can show children how

to decode words by teaching the names of letters and their distinctive sounds within the context of words (Auerbach, 1995).

Educational television programs such as the new PBS kids series, Between the Lions, have demonstrated that TV can teach kids basic reading skills (Giles, 2000). Set in an imaginary library run by a family of lions, Between the Lions, offers puppetry, animation, live action, and music (Giles, 2000). The program is the centerpiece of a multimedia literacy initiative that includes a web site (www.pbskids.org/lions), books, videos, parent workshops, teacher guides, and other outreach materials (Giles, 2000).

Summary

Using music as a means to attain reading skills is engaging and non-threatening for students. Music is a common thread of understanding and enjoyment between children across all cultures. Music and rhyme can especially be beneficial for students struggling with reading. Music can also help children depict the tone and setting of stories when played before reading. This method engages the student, and adds excitement to the lesson.

In order for students to become lifelong readers, they must have comfortable, "easy" reading experiences. There is a need for supportive and interesting books; books children can read with ease, so they feel successful and confident, instead of frustration or anxiety. When children can read with ease, they choose to keep reading, because it is effortless. Meaningful practice occurs during the repeated readings and provides the student with opportunities to develop fluency and other important reading skills such as

comprehension and vocabulary (Opitz, 1999). Not only do books need to be age appropriate, they must be interesting. When students are interested, the affective filter is low and learning occurs. Literature that deals with cultural diversity could really help English Language Learners feel more comfortable and spark interest. Not only do they "validate" other cultures but they also provide children opportunities to learn about the similarities and differences among people and to consider different points of view (Opitz, 1999).

Using teaching toys in the classroom with beginning readers can be helpful tools because students are visually seeing, and touching these toys. They are engaged in a hands-on, interactive experience. For example, the Leap Frog Phonics learning system mentioned above offers children big shapes of letters that "talk" and sound the names of the letters out when pressed (Auerbach, 1995). This provides visual, tactile, and audible stimulus for students.

Educational television shows are fun, and an interesting media in promoting reading. Children love to watch cartoons, they are attention grabbing and attractive. PBS and the Discovery Channel offer creative and informative programs. Both companies also provide videotapes to schools for supplemental materials to schools for teachers to use in the classroom. The show Between the Lions combines phonics and whole language instruction in each episode (Giles, 2000). This is a great teaching alternative to dittos or rote exercises.

Implications

I would use all of the teaching techniques mentioned above in order to make beginning readers feel at ease and interested in reading. I believe teachers need to use a variety of methods in order to engage students. One has a choice of methods and can match material to the child's development. Educators need to research and collect age appropriate reading materials for their classroom. Whether phonics or whole language or a combination of both are used in the classroom, how educators decide to teach these methods, and the materials used are critical in keeping students engaged and increasing reading ability.

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